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Food Distribution in Times of Disaster

Who Can Benefit From This Food?

"Disaster" means any physical occurrence—natural or manmade—that causes great loss or distress. Disasters may strike without warning. At these times, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), through the Food Distribution Programs, donates food to help disaster victims.

Anyone living in a presidentially declared disaster area who needs food may benefit from donated commodities. USDA makes commodities available to disaster organizations, such as the American Red Cross and the Salvation Army, for use in preparing meals for disaster victims.

In some instances, commodities are also made available for household distribution.

USDA commodities may also be made available to assist people residing in areas that have experienced a disaster or emergency not of sufficient magnitude to warrant a presidential declaration.

In disaster situations where commercial food channels remain intact, disaster victims may also benefit from special coupon issuance under the Food Stamp Program.

How Does the Commodity Program Operate?

USDA routinely buys food under price-support, surplus-removal, and related legislation, and makes this food available to States for designated outlets. USDA pays for the initial processing and packaging of the food and for transporting it to designated points within each State. State distributing agencies are then responsible for storing the food, transporting it, and distributing the food at the local level to eligible participants in the various food programs located in that State.

The Secretary of Agriculture is responsible for ensuring that adequate stocks of food are available for group feeding or household distribution in any area suffering from a major disaster or emergency. During a disaster, food that has been purchased by USDA for use in a State's food programs is made available to disaster organizations in that State. The State distributing agency ensures that the donated foods, stored in school stockrooms and in county or State-controlled warehouses, reach the relief agencies. These foods are replaced by USDA.

Is On-the-Spot Help Provided?

In disaster situations, USDA field staff are on hand to help local, State, and Federal personnel carry out emergency functions. Disaster relief agencies include many recognized charitable institutions or associations such as welfare agencies, military organizations, and church groups. These organizations often help by preparing meals with donated foods and serving them at central locations to the disaster victims

For additional information contact the Food and Nutrition Service regional office for your State.

Northeast Regional Office

Food and Nutrition Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
10 Causeway Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02222
Telephone: (617) 565-6370
*Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts,
New Hampshire, New York,
Rhode Island, Vermont*

Southeast Regional Office

Food and Nutrition Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
77 Forsyth Street, S.W., Suite 112
Atlanta, Georgia 30303
Telephone: (404) 730-2566
*Alabama, Florida, Georgia,
Kentucky, Mississippi,
North Carolina, South Carolina,
Tennessee*

Midwest Regional Office

Food and Nutrition Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
50 East Washington Street
Chicago, Illinois 60602
Telephone: (312) 353-6664
*Illinois, Indiana, Michigan,
Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin*

Mid-Atlantic Regional Office

Food and Nutrition Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Mercer Corporate Park
CN 02150
Trenton, New Jersey 08650
Telephone: (609) 259-5025
*Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey,
Pennsylvania, Washington DC,
Virginia, West Virginia, Puerto Rico,
Virgin Islands*

Southwest Regional Office

Food and Nutrition Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1100 Commerce Street, Room 5-C-30
Dallas, Texas 75242
Telephone: (214) 767-0222
*Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico,
Oklahoma, Texas*

Mountain Plains Regional Office

Food and Nutrition Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1244 Speer Boulevard, Suite 903
Denver, Colorado 80204
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*Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri,
Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota,
South Dakota, Utah, Wyoming*

Western Regional Office

Food and Nutrition Service
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550 Kearney Street, Room 400
San Francisco, California 94108
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*Alaska, American Samoa, Arizona,
California, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho,
Nevada, Oregon, Trust Territories,
Washington*

The Food Distribution Programs of the U.S. Department of Agriculture are available to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or handicap.